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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MARY PARLIAMENT CANDIDATES HAVE  
LITTLE TO SAY

REF: ASHGABAT 1453

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A November 14 meeting with the mayor and deputy mayor of the city of Mary revealed a reluctance to discuss substantive matters regarding the local election. One local candidate declined to explain his campaign platform because -- although the election is about a month away -- he felt it was too early to expose his "secret" to the competition. An informal group of people consisting of at least ten people can initiate the nomination of "independent" candidates. One candidate from the city of Mary is running as an independent. Local officials discussed with pride the construction projects that the president would soon officially open, as well as other projects planned for construction. After the mayor left, the deputy mayor and others asked various questions about American life, some concerning elections but most, revealingly, were about life in a market economy. END SUMMARY.

#### DISCUSSION ABOUT TURKMENISTAN'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

¶2. (SBU) Deputy Mayor of the city of Mary Berdy Atamuradov explained at the beginning of the November 14 meeting that econoff would meet only with Mayor Tirkesh Durdyliyev, and not with provincial-level leadership, which also meant that they could discuss local issues only. Durdyliyev said that 29 of the total 125 parliamentary seats are for Mary. Seven people will stand for election for the three seats representing the city of Mary. Durdyliyev said that the party can select candidates, as well as trade organizations and community organizations (youth, women, etc.). In addition, any group consisting of ten people can initiate the process of nominating a candidate. Upon deciding to nominate a candidate, the group members must register the group, gather 200 signatures on a petition, and file an application. The mayor said that one candidate from Mary, city heating engineer Shamuhamet Atayev, is running for election as an independent nominated by a group. Durdyliyev said that "Turkmen know each other well because it is a small country and therefore people do not nominate themselves (but they nominate each other since) they've known each other for many years." He added that "all candidates would do a good job," regardless of who wins, and "our candidates don't fight

because they are for the people." He said that in the newly-formed parliament, deputies will focus on legislation. He closed by saying that the top priority of the parliament is to pass laws written to international standards.

#### PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES DECLINE TO DISCUSS PLATFORMS

13. (SBU) Orazgeldy Hummedov, who served in the parliament from 1999-2004, is the Deputy Head of the Mayor's Education, Health, and Culture Department. Hummedov declined to reveal his campaign platform because he felt it was too early in the race to make this information public, referring to it as "secret." He did articulate, however, that he felt it is "important to take another look at some laws" and to consider revising them. Mayor Durdyliev also explained that Hummedov is an older gentleman and therefore very respected in the community, implying that Turkmen citizens would not ask Candidate Hummedov many questions regarding his plans if elected to the parliament because of he is an elder. Charymurad Amanov, Main Tax Inspector of the Tax Service of the City of Mary, is also standing as a candidate and met with econoff.

"HEALTHY PEOPLE = HEALTHY GOVERNMENT"

14. (SBU) Atamuradov said that the government has commissioned several schools for Mary as a result of the president's emphasis on education and health issues, two of which would be finished soon. The president will most likely attend official opening ceremonies for a school, the new airport, and the mosque with seats for 2,000 worshipers (and an

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additional seating for 1,500 for sacrificial meals) in December. Durdyliev said that Mary Airport will become an international airport with routes to Dubai and Moscow for tourists visiting the ancient settlements of Merv and Margush. Construction on three new schools of 600 students each will commence in 2009. Construction on a 10,000-person stadium was recently completed, and two more sports complexes will soon be finished. Kindergartens and diagnostic medical centers are also planned for Mary. Atamuradov said that a "healthy people provides for a healthy government." He also noted that 20 people have taken out consumer credit loans, with others in the process of preparing loan applications.

#### BERDIMUHAMEDOV HIMSELF WILL TEST NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

15. (SBU) According to Durdyliev, Mary's provincial portion of the national highway system currently under construction will be completed in December. A railway system for the entire country is also under construction. According to Atamuradov, the president will drive on the roads himself in order to review road conditions.

#### CURIOSITY ABOUT U.S. LIFE

16. (SBU) After Mayor Durdyliev left the meeting -- to check on the many construction projects underway in his town -- Deputy Mayor Atamuradov, in the presence of other officials including a Central Elections Commission official who did not introduce himself, asked questions about life in the U.S.: What is better, private or public education? How does one finance one's retirement? What percentage of people voted in the U.S. presidential election on November 4? How does a citizen register as a candidate for elective office?

17. (SBU) COMMENT: There was a more lively conversation over life in the United States than about the elections. The candidates had little to say. Campaigning is an unknown concept. They also likely had little understanding of exactly what their future position entailed. END COMMENT.  
MILES